



Convict Trail Project

August 2021 Newsletter

Welcome to our new format CTP Newsletter. At the beginning of July, our Project Director Wesley Warren finished the second extension of his contract with the CTP and left us to pursue his teaching career. So while we have all been in COVID lock, the Convict Trail Project Executive has been very busy continuing to manage the CTP. Mari Metzke, the CTP Chair, has spent many hours sorting through the boxes of files and other information that was delivered to her back verandah by Wes on his last day with us. She has finally got our CTP house in order and some help in this has been provided by the Secretary Jan Kofron. Meantime, the CTP Treasurer Michael Young has been doing battle with "the Cloud" to bring our communications back to earth. Of course we will be having a Board Meeting as soon as lockdown is lifted. In the meantime we thought it would be good to share with our membership, through our Newsletter, some of the interesting Road facts unearthed during the general CTP clean up. We will share with you a "walk down memory lane" so to speak, by dividing the 240 kilometres of the Road into many different areas and we will take you on a trip along the Road via some of the material in our archives. We hope you enjoy the walk and would welcome any input from our readers. Our first "walk" centres around Canada Bay and an article written by Liz Roberts follows.

A VIRTUAL WALK UP THE GNR: The Great North Road from Parramatta Road to Abbotsford Point

Initially it was planned that the Great North Road would go from Sydney via Parramatta then Castle Hill before heading north to cross the Hawkesbury River at Lower Portland Head (Wisemans Ferry). When Thomas Mitchell (later Sir) was appointed Surveyor General he decided to shorten the road by several miles by taking it directly from Parramatta Road to cross the Parramatta River at its narrowest point in that part of the river and then northwards to join the road already being built at what is now Round Corner.

At the time the land on either side of Parramatta Road was unsettled scrub land. In 1828 there were only 29 people who gave their address as Parramatta Road and most of these lived in Petersham. The road to be named the Great North Road ran from Parramatta Road [now the suburb of Five Dock] to the river through the back end of Dr John Harris's 1000 acre grant allowing it to later be easily subdivided.

An inn was soon established next to the wharf. This operated until the ferry closed with the opening of Gladesville Bridge. The inn was purchased by the Sydney Rowing Club, and they have incorporated some of the stones from the original building into a feature wall in one of the reception rooms.

In 2017 after several years in planning a large street sculpture was unveiled in the Canada Bay area celebrating the road and the many convicts that built it. The CTP was involved in writing the background material for the draft proposal for the art work, then in helping select three from the applicants. The council then paid these artists to produce models of their concepts before selecting a proposal designed by Alexandra Gillespie and Shawn Kirby of Thylacine in Queanbeyan. The sculpture consists of two mammoth blocks of sandstone spilt by 5 bronze wedges and under lit in the split. The names of Road Party 14 were engraved on the wedges. The sculpture was named "Reformers" honouring the road and the many now often nameless men who built it. It is one of 15 art installation the Canada Bay Council installed as part of Five Docks Street scape upgrade. For many years this was the only section of the 240 kilometre road that still bore the name Great North Road. The accompanying photo of the sculpture encourages us all to add this to our list of "must see sites" after lockdown.

For more information also look at:

https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/the_road_north

Next month we will "walk" around Bedlam Point.



VALE: Joan Robinson [1929-2021] – Modern Woman of the GNR



Alexandria Joan Robinson was born March 1929, to be called Joan, but not with the initials JAR. Fourteen years younger than her sister, Joan was a child of the depression. Her father lost his job as paymaster for railway construction camps where they lived on site in a portable house, with the workers living in tents. He was later employed as paymaster for Department of Main Roads construction camps. It was when they were at Milbrodale (Camp No 1) for the emergency WW2 reconstruction of the Putty Road as a route north that Joan developed her passion for bushwalking and old roads. She and her father spent many weekends searching for, then walking on the original road over the mountains that was bypassed for an easier route. To attend high school whilst living at Milbrodale, Joan was a weekly boarder in Singleton, travelling in on the milk truck on Monday morning and home again on Saturday, in the cab if there were no adult passengers, otherwise on the back with the cans. On leaving school, Joan was awarded a music teacher's scholarship and when trained she taught in Sydney.

The mid 1960s was a turning point in Joan's life when the deaths in close succession of both her long term boyfriend and her Father resulted in Joan needing to live with her mother. In 1967 Joan transferred to Newcastle and joined the YMCA based Ramblers Bushwalking Club.

A year or so later after transferring to Gateshead High School, Joan became heavily involved in supervising activities for the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme and through it often visited the Great North Road where she took her student to explore either the road or the surrounding Aboriginal evidence. A born teacher, keen observer and explorer Joan loved passing on the information she found on her bushwalks particularly the locations of carved graffiti. Joan bushwalked weekly well into her 80s till her deteriorating eyesight made falls a danger. Also the health of her walking companion's wife deteriorated to the stage that she could not be left alone while Joan and her friend walked.

Joan was a keen supporter of both the Convict Trail Project and Dharug and Lower Hawkesbury Historical Society and her wide knowledge of where things were in the bush will be greatly missed.

[contributed by Elizabeth Roberts]

LOCKDOWN CONVICT LINKS:

Port Macquarie's First Convicts – a new book on convicts reviewed by E.A. Roberts
Port Macquarie Historical Society's latest publication "*Port Macquarie's First Convicts*" was recently launched by the Hon. Don Harwin, Minister for the Arts. Whilst this book is from a slightly earlier period to our road construction, as a study of a small group of convicts it helps develop a picture of how the system worked in NSW. Researched and written by Clive Smith, the publication for the first time reveals the names and biographical details of Port Macquarie's first convicts. By trawling through historical records and archives, Clive identified most of the previously nameless male convicts who volunteered to come to Port Macquarie to build the penal settlement for a tickets of leave. Some were successful, others not so. Copies are available from the Port Macquarie Museum, 22 Clarence Street, Port Macquarie NSW 2444. Phone:(02) 6583 1108. Cost: \$10 each plus postage. This slim volume is a great companion to the earlier published 400 page "Winding Sheet" with its biographical material on the convicts buried in the first Port Macquarie cemetery.

[Review by E.A Roberts]

Interesting Websites

"Child Convicts of Australia" produced by ABC Education and Sydney Living Museums takes six short chapters to tell the child convict story using images and dialogue. It is aimed at the school student but is so well done that students of history of all ages will like it. Go to <https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/learning/resources/child-convicts-australia>

"British Convicts to Australia", on the website of Historic UK, tells the convict story from the other point of view. Unfortunately their website has advertisement scattered through the story but I did discover you can turn off the ads by clicking on the X. There are also interesting links running down the side of their page which let me learn more about the Tolpuddle Martyrs and view a time line of the Industrial Revolution. Go to <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/British-Convicts-to-Australia/>

And in closing CTP Membership renewals will be sent out soon. We hope you will renew your membership as your continued support is very important to us. The strength of the CTP has always been its membership and the Great North Road still needs you!!